

# Appalshop

INNOVATION LAB GUIDE

# Introduction



Community organizations, often staffed by volunteers, have few staff or financial resources to commit to technology. Organizing meetings, keeping in contact with volunteers, and, of course, fundraising takes an enormous amount of time and energy – especially in rural America where geographic distance, lack of resources, and other chronic challenges raise the bar for change-making.

Many of us have witnessed consolidation of traditional media during the last twenty years, which obliterates local newspapers and radio stations that have provided important venues of civic dialogue in the past. This guide is designed to help you learn, and in turn be able to teach, how developing a communication strategy can help organizations of all sizes make use of low-cost media tools. Effective communication helps accomplish your organization's work and build movements for change whether working at a local, regional, or national level.

Community development and organizing groups ask, "Who will speak out about our communities' collective problems?" And "How can we work together to define and address the barriers that prevent rural communities from enjoying access to health care, a safe environment, new technology, and economic development?"

An important step in addressing these questions is to develop and use effective communication strategies. We hope this guide will help you bring greater and more effective communication capacity to your work by taking full advantage of low-cost technology.

Sincerely,

Nick Szuberla and Mark Kidd, Appalshop





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# Overview



### Who is this Guide for?

This guide is designed specifically for small, rural organizations that are undertaking campaigns, outreach plans, or instituting new online communication platforms. If you want to garner more volunteers, share your organization's story with donors, or let your community know about a pressing issue, this guide is also for you. It will help you launch a campaign or just figure out how to get media content onto your website.

### How this Guide will help you:

Have you been asked to create a communication strategy for your organization? Maybe you need to build your individual donor base or recruit 50 new volunteers. Many times we jump into using a technology without having formulated a plan. We hop onto Facebook or Twitter without asking ourselves simple questions like, "Why this tool?" That approach can lead to shaky results, frustrated interns, and burned out staff.

#### Before you begin, remember to:

1. Take your time.
2. Tap your creative spirit.
3. Keep it simple.

### Using and adapting this guide

Stories and worksheets included in this guide were developed with contributions from community organizations and volunteers working for change in rural communities. We believe they illustrate the power and potential for storytelling to improve the way our organizations and communities work. We have licensed this guide under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported [CC BY-NC-SA 3.0] license, which means you are free to share (copy, distribute, and transmit the work) and remix (adapt the work) under the following conditions:

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# Overview



## Take your time.

Don't rush into using online tools or try to copy what your favorite media organizations are doing. Instead, evaluate your needs and examine how each tool might benefit you. Make a plan that identifies the results you seek. Come up with a measurement (like the number of volunteers, dollars, or phone calls you're seeking) to evaluate your success.



## Tap your creative spirit.

People are involved with your organization because they believe in what you do – get them excited! Bring in students, neighbors, and church members to share their ideas and skills. Don't let the technology hamper your creative spirit because you're new to it. Cut loose! Don't be afraid of making mistakes.



## Keep it simple.

Start off slow and set realistic goals. You're not going to get a massive project off the ground in a week or a month. Start with small steps to get the heartbeat of your organization's communication strategy going. Start a weekly image post on your Facebook page or other social media sites or email a monthly "success story" to your supporters.



## Finding Solutions

Recruiting folks to help with technology can be tough in rural communities. Several years ago we secured a grant to build a community website, and decided to hire a consultant to manage the project. After several weeks of planning, we received a formal project plan from the consultant. The problem was that the plan seemed cookie-cutter.

We realized that we had made a critical mistake. As soon as we finally found funding for this project we forgot the lessons learned during the time when the only resources we had were staff time and help from volunteers. In order to get back on track, we spent a lot of time at the coffee shop asking young people how they were using technology. We also sent a survey out to people on our email list asking for suggestions.

In the end, the funding and assistance from a professional consultant made it possible for us to build a powerful web platform, but we did it in a way that made sense to our community and constituency. We also hired one of the young people we got to know during the process, who went on to become a vital part of the project team.

*Look for low-cost ways to learn from your own community about how they use technology before paying an "expert."*

## Campaigns

We were once talking to an established non-profit professional in our community who assured us their organization "doesn't do campaigns." Whether we realize it or not, we all do campaigns. When we raise money, recruit volunteers, or even secure lumber for a home build, we are using communication tools to reach our goals: we are campaigning. A campaign is simply a planned course of action designed to achieve and reach defined objectives.

## Narrative Campaigns

Stories can strengthen your organization and increase its impact. Taking the time to have people both listen and share stories about why they became involved in your organization's work is an important step in inviting them to participate. Telling and listening to stories in the community you serve can also increase the impact your organization has on a given issue.

You can use stories to create "narrative campaigns," an approach that uses the power of stories to drive forward your organization's goals. One result of narrative campaigns is the sense of pride of place that people feel when hearing from an elder, artist, or inspirational individual in their community. Rediscovering a sense of pride of place is often a first step to saving your local main street, fighting for better health care, or creating space to speak out about local environmental conditions.

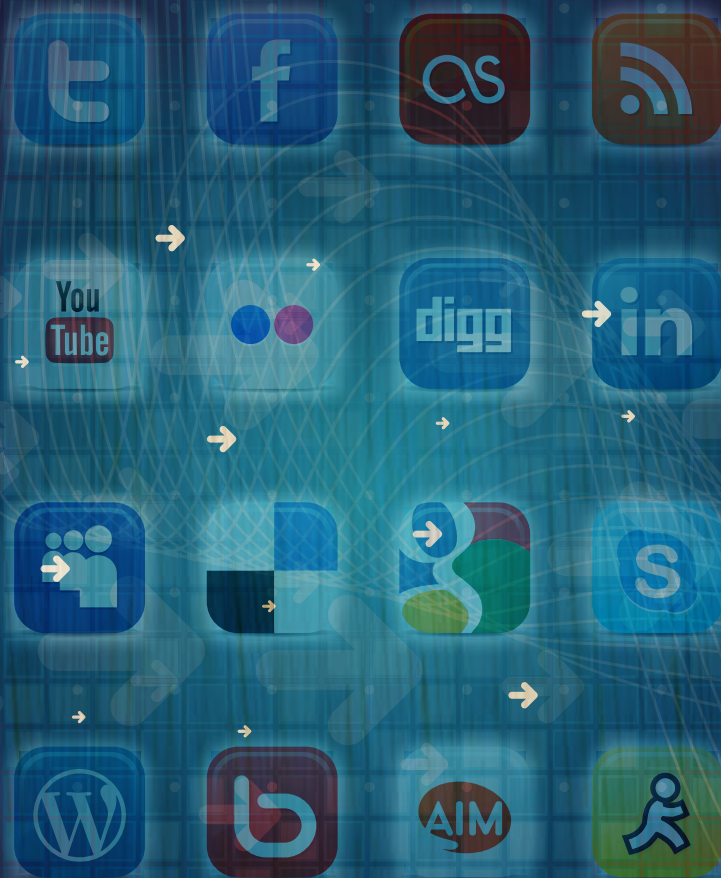


**A cautionary note.** Stories are powerful. You need to test them out before you decide to take them into the public arena. Bring in a friendly journalist or impartial listener to push back on the stories you want to share – asking questions and challenging their relevance. Depending on the nature of your campaign, you also might want to seek independent verification of the truthfulness and accuracy of your narratives.

By connecting our stories to those of others in our group or community, we build a bigger story that includes us all and connects us all – in a more intimate way – to the issues we want to address. This is an important step in building grassroots power for making positive change.



# Getting Started





How many of us have said “We should be on Twitter” or been told by a supervisor to “get us on Facebook”? Before we commit to new tools or launching a communications campaign we have to figure out where we’re starting from. It’s useful to think about the ways we communicate *in* our community and *about* our community.

### Measuring Your Communication Capacity

Think about the work you do, and use the table below to note whether each area is one that needs work, is serving you and your organization well enough, or is a strength.

CAPACITIES	VERY POOR	POOR	AVERAGE	GOOD	EXCELLENT
CLEAR OBJECTIVES					
BRAND FOR THE PROJECT OR ORGANIZATION					
SOMEONE IS “ON POINT”					
COMMUNICATIONS IS “PART OF THE PLAN”					
IDENTIFYING TARGET AUDIENCES					
ELEVATOR SPEECHES					
USING STORIES					
SETTING GOALS AND METRICS					

**3 Words (Or Less)** Describe the work you do in three words.  
You may not use any words in your organization’s name.

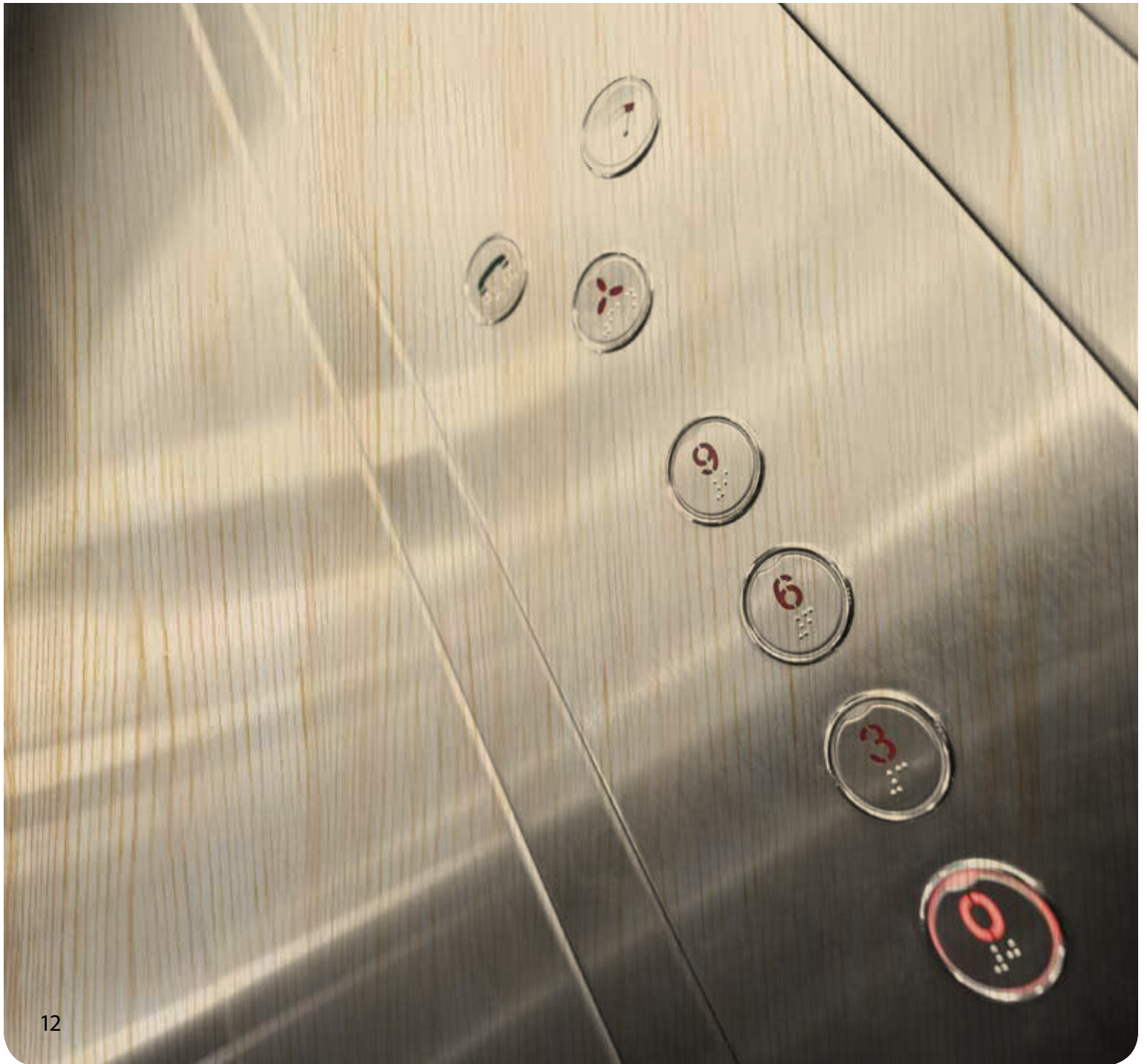
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# Elevator Speech





Many opportunities to recruit volunteers, build support among community leaders, and conduct outreach are spontaneous, informal, and happen outside of offices or classrooms. The elevator speech takes its name from one common place we encounter potential supporters.



- Imagine you find yourself in an elevator or grocery line with a potential donor or the person whose support you need the most – what do you say?
- Do you know what the other members of your organization would say in the same situation?

Often we drift into non-profit speak and use abstract or scientific terms to describe our work. Even worse, we forget to invite the other person to participate entirely! Practicing these short, informal conversations within your organization helps make sure your team has a clear, consistent message and story about the important issues you face.



# Elevator Speech



**1. OPENING:** Grab your audience's attention.

*"A third of kindergartners in our town are raised by their grandparents, and the numbers are still going up."*



**2. CHALLENGE OR OPPORTUNITY:** What is the issue that your organization is addressing?

*"A lot of these grandparents need extra help raising young children, but they are not participating in programs for parents and the social workers have not been trained to work with older people on these issues."*



**3. SOLUTION:** How does your organization's work address the problem you are outlining?

*"Our members at the Big Ridge Kiwanis Club want to make sure that social workers have a chance to learn about the issue and that their supervisors will support new training. We also want to get the word out to elderly caregivers about the resources that are available."*



**4. ACTION:** This is the most important part of the elevator speech. Your contact needs to know what they can do now that they want to get involved. Would they like to be on the mailing list? Will you 'friend' them on Facebook? Will they come to your next meeting?

*"Will you come to a meeting at Flint Gap Church next Thursday night? We've also asked members of the Family Services staff and church leaders to come – so support from our elected leaders would mean a lot."*



**IT'S A CONVERSATION:** Allow time for your contact to share their ideas and ask questions.

**DON'T HOLD BACK:** Let people know why you do what you do and the passion you have.

**BE BRIEF:** Getting to the core point is important.

**SPEAK LIKE YOURSELF:** Use your own voice and speak in a way that makes sense to you.



# Elevator Speech

**IDEA:**

Try starting from the bottom and working your way from Action to Opening.

**Opening:** Capture your listener's attention and interest.

**Challenge or Opportunity:** What is the specific issue?

**Solution:** How can our community respond to the issue?

**Action:** What can they do to get involved? What's the next step?



# Low-Cost Video





Picking up a camera and recording images can lead to amazing things happening in your community. Those simple activities can allow you to take ownership of your hometown by representing it from your own perspective.

Consider a group of fifth and sixth grade students from Lotts Creek, Kentucky who kicked off a video project by doing a “positive mirroring exercise” of their community. The junior filmmakers began by shooting ten positive images of rural Appalachia. When they presented the positive images, a public conversation began about all the negative media coverage their region receives.



- Low-cost video cameras provide a simple way to gather stories in your community.
- Don't start by shooting footage that will need to be edited. Ask people a direct question on camera, and have them answer it all in one take. Put up several separate clips to tell your full story.
- BIG TIP: Never record a meeting. You capture too much video to be helpful. Instead, pull people aside during or after the meeting and have them share their story while looking directly into the camera. Meeting footage is not exciting. (See more helpful tips below)

During another exercise, students interviewed fellow community members about quality-of-life issues. One interviewee spoke about problems with coal mining blasts near his home. While filming the blast sites, students ran into state mine inspectors who ordered the young video makers to turn off their camera and leave.

Determined to learn why they had been denied access, the students contacted the Division of Mine Reclamation and Enforcement with interview requests. After an onslaught of letters, phone calls, and emails, the request was granted. During an interview with one inspector, the students learned the purity of their drinking water was being threatened by a plan to open a new mine nearby. The students were now onto an important story about an issue that impacted the health and future of their community.

After a few long nights of work, the students debuted a film that explained exactly what was at stake. They hosted the screening in their school gymnasium. Some who attended were there because they had been interviewed, others because they had heard rumors about the mine and were concerned. After the screening, the audience held a spontaneous discussion in which both young and old agreed that it was important for the community to fight the mining permit.

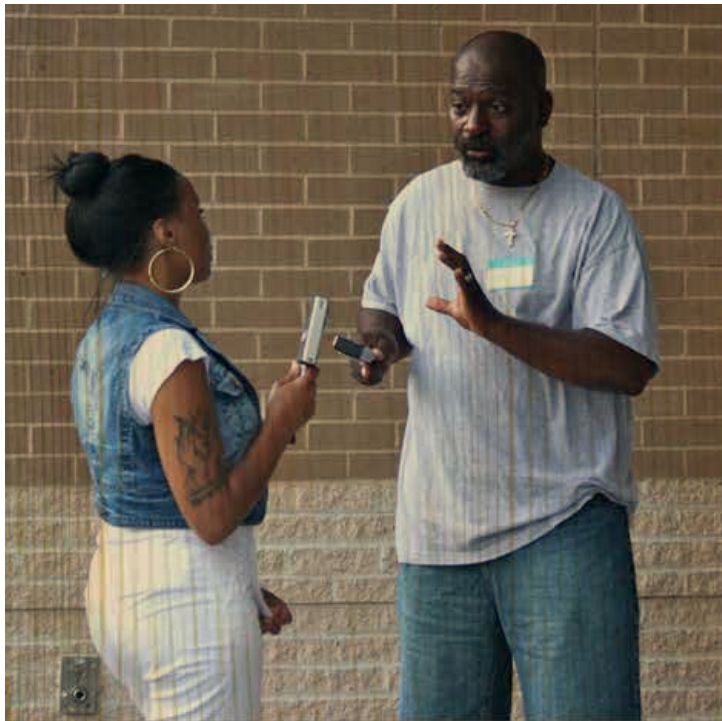
Though they had already succeeded in bringing the mine issue to light, the students wanted to do more. Working with a local grassroots group, they took a surprise trip to the Division of Mine Reclamation and Enforcement to confront officials and demand they revoke the permit. Two weeks later, the officials did. A student later reflected that she felt this was one moment when “we were all together as one...just for one day.”

Sometimes, just telling your community's story can inspire action.





# Low-Cost Video



Here are some fun exercises you can do to get started with video.

1. Shoot the alphabet:

- Walk down the street and shoot an image that represents an “A, B, C, D, E, etc.”
- Position the camera, frame the image, and then shoot twenty seconds or more of the image.
- Don’t forget to view the images together.

2. Two camera relay race (this is fun for a larger group):

- Separate into two groups.
- Choose a route that involves going around corners, both inside and outside, and some interesting movement.
- Tell participants that this is an exercise about handheld shooting.
- Tell participants they can carry the camera however they want: run, walk slow, or even float it along the ground.
- Start the two groups at the same time, without cameras being turned off the entire race.
- Review the footage at the same time with the two groups sitting side-by-side.

3. Record a five-shot video portrait that represents yourself. (No sound allowed)

4. Record a five-shot video portrait that represents a person you know. (No sound allowed)

5. Visit an abandoned cemetery, old bridge, or mill. Record five shots that tell the story of the place.

6. Document a process like making a sandwich. Shoot all the steps as creatively as possible.

7. Develop a set of interview questions. Conduct street interviews for an hour by approaching people and asking them questions.

8. Interview each other about why you are involved with your organization. Put those clips up on your website and social media pages!



The best way to learn how to use video is to practice.



Shoot a video and then watch your footage noting what works (good lighting, interesting content, easy to hear sound) and what doesn’t (bouncing footage, poor sound quality, and difficult lighting).



Make sure that everyone gets to use the camera and take part in the exercises, not just your organization’s ‘techies’ or interns. Anyone can use video!





# Story of You



**Why use stories?** Why not just give people the facts? Or better yet, statistics? Moving people to take action for change involves engaging them “where they are” and often means connecting with them through the power of stories. As we grow our organizations, we tend to get bogged down in the work of building an institution and other internal thinking that is far removed from the folks we are trying to reach.

We suggest the Marshall Ganz “public narrative” model that brings people together to tell the individual “story of you,” the collective “story of us,” and the action-oriented “story of now.” What Ganz calls public narrative, or what we call “narrative strategies,” can be used as a part of your organizing to discover community assets and need, build support, create new leadership, and engage your community.



#### **STORIES SERVE MANY FUNCTIONS:**

1. **Personal empowerment** – By writing or telling your own story, you feel confident; you figure out personal patterns in your own life; you come to feel important and valuable. “I am somebody.”
2. **Community building and empowerment** – By sharing stories in a group or community, you realize that you share things in common with other people, you figure out political patterns in society (e.g. “all these other people like me are dealing with poor water quality, too, that’s not just coincidence”), and you build relationships and solidarity.
3. **Education and information** – By sharing stories more broadly, whether through the Internet, recordings, books, performances, articles, or other mediums, you educate, inform, publicize, persuade, and perhaps enlarge your community.

#### **COMMUNICATIONS IS (NOT JUST PUBLICITY)**

- All the ways that a group or organization communicates internally and with its communities and constituents.
- A process that starts at the beginning of a project and is not just putting out a press release when help is needed or the work is done.





# Story of You



## **Tactics are the actions taken to implement strategies.**

A tactic could be setting up a table outside of the grocery store and signing up volunteers or using Facebook and local radio stations to spread the word about an upcoming event. The challenge is to have a strategy before determining which tactics to use.

We were working with a grassroots group that wanted to pass a piece of legislation by setting up campaigns throughout the state. During the planning process, we discovered that there were just two key legislators who needed to be convinced in order to move the bill out of committee and up for a public vote. The campaign changed tactics, and focused on putting pressure on those key legislators in order to achieve the desired social change.

Taking time to discuss your strategy before diving into tactics will save your campaign energy and produce better results.



- Using your knowledge of your community and who to talk to is one of your greatest assets.
- Recording stories in one day and uploading them in the evening is a great workflow. Don't take on too much.
- Humor and local "color" is great. Think about what you like to watch online. Look for the "warm fuzzy kitten" in your work and record it!



Whenever Samantha Sparkman, 21, opened her laptop to get online to study or surf the Internet, she had a ridiculously long wait. On Pine Mountain, near the border between Letcher County and Harlan County, Kentucky, Internet access is the same as it was in 1991 – dial-up. “It took me three days to download 15 songs,” she says. But Sparkman was studying to become a physical therapy assistant, so she wasn’t merely facing a lack of new music, she needed access to online tests and lectures. She was missing out on coursework.

Knowing others in her community encountered the same frustrations, Sparkman decided to figure out a way to help folks share and establish their stories in the public conversation. She began by walking around her community conducting interviews with a low-cost video camera. Everyone seemed eager to share how the region’s lack of broadband access hurt them. In just one day, she recorded over twenty interviews.

Sparkman used social networking to build a large audience for her interviews. She organized a “digital quilting bee,” where she and friends spent an afternoon posting them on Facebook and Twitter. The quilters also asked people to take action by contacting the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) about the lack of broadband access in the Pine Mountain area.

This group of volunteers, now calling themselves “Pine Mountain Residents for Broadband,” also produced a tongue-in-cheek music video titled “Dial-Up Rocks.” A few email blasts later, the video went viral, and a national radio program contacted Sparkman for the full story. By then, Sparkman’s videos were being promoted by national groups, and had caught the attention of the chairman of the FCC.



#### TIPS

Once you have recorded your stories you need to share them with your community. Gathering a group of friends together to do a “digital quilting bee” is a great way to jump-start the process. Be sure to:

1. Include basic facts or a short story as a description for your video when you share it. Make sure anyone else who is helping spread the video also has the description.
2. Ask your friends and supporters to re-post and share.
3. Have a clear action step for people who watch the video to take -- a number to call, a person to contact, or something to contribute.



# Story of We



## Creating a Story Bank

Virginia is a big state. Rural communities in Southwest Virginia can be as much as eight hours away from the urban centers on the state's east coast. In some cases Virginia's rural towns and big cities can remain isolated from one another, sharing little in terms of culture or politics.

The issue of over-incarceration is a growing problem for both rural and urban communities, one that's being exacerbated by the commonwealth's "no parole" policy. Parole offers reduced sentences to prisoners who work hard at rehabilitation. In 1995, Virginia ended parole and as a result Virginia's prison population almost doubled. Even those serving time for non-violent offenses were forced to serve out lengthier terms.

In order to fight the no-parole policy, the Community Restoration Campaign ([www.communityrestorationcampaign.org](http://www.communityrestorationcampaign.org)), a statewide, family-led coalition, created an online story bank with the aim of educating the public about the law and the damage it was causing. First, the coalition set up a toll free phone number for a virtual answering machine from the Skype service. Second, they sent out emails and postcards to prisoner family groups that posed a simple question: "How does no parole affect you and your family?" Participants were to call the toll-free number with their answer. Once a strong collection of stories had been gathered they were uploaded to a website. The public was then invited to contribute their own stories.

The Community Restoration Campaign story bank grew even larger as organizations spread word about the project at events and meetings. During some meetings, organizations paused their proceedings to give attendees a few minutes to call in to the story bank. Many did.

The campaign was able to use the power of story and media to dramatically grow awareness about no parole. People who had never spoken up about no-parole shared their stories, and distant communities found they had more in common than they knew.



1. A story bank is simply a place (online or offline) where you have gathered and stored a group of stories for use in outreach and campaigns.
2. Building a story bank before you need the stories is key. Get started today.
3. A story bank can be in any form: video, audio, image, or text, but it should be manageable and ready to share. The story of how your organization came to be might be the first story you add to your bank.



#### TIPS

How to setup a simple StoryLine:

1. Create an account at Skype ([www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com))
2. Pay the small fee to have a dedicated phone number for your account.
3. Record an outgoing message and interview release on your Skype answering machine, then set Skype to answer calls immediately. "Welcome to our story line, you can record your story about SUBJECT after the beep. By doing so you give us permission to use it in any form. Thank you for calling."
4. Write up questions and prompts to circulate then post the audio on the web and social media as it is received.





# Innovation



## Getting Innovative

Zak Pence was tired of the people and towns of Appalachia being portrayed in grimy squalor. As communications director for University of Kentucky's Appalachian Center, Pence decided he'd do something about it. A photo contest sounded about right. Pence says he knew the contest would be "a low-cost, fun, interesting project for The Center that could generate publicity for us and help out the community."

He dubbed the contest "Re-Imaging Appalachia," sent press releases about it to local newspapers all over the region, and posted announcements about it on the web. He tasked contestants with shooting non-stereotypical photos of Appalachia that would help redefine it to outsiders. Photos needed to include a description of where and when they'd been taken, but there weren't many other guidelines. There would be a first prize of \$500 and a second prize of \$150.

The entries began pouring in. Soon, the Appalachian Center had 150 photos to sort through.

Pence easily found local artists and activists willing to judge the competition. When they announced their decision, the Associated Press, which serves thousands of daily newspapers, picked up the story. That gave Pence and the photographers a chance to speak out. "We blame the media for producing all of these horrible images of Appalachia," he told a reporter.

Wrapping up their effort, the Appalachian Center selected 30 photos from the contest to be displayed in an art show. The center was able to bring attention to an important issue by using simple, low-cost media and Internet tools.



## TIPS:

Think about using social media sites to share your organization's or community's story through images. Build online story banks in advance, so when the time comes you have powerful stories, ready to serve your campaign, recorded and ready to go.

# Final Notes



## Remember:

- Set a goal.
- Keep your communication simple.
- Tell a story.
- Start with a simple project.

## Acknowledgments:

We would like to thank all of those who made this guide possible:

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- Cristian Gomez
- Seamus Holman, Gridwork Design
- The many community organizations who tested and improved this guide during its development





# Worksheets





# Measuring Your Communication Capacity

It's useful to think about the ways we communicate *in* our community and *about* our community. Please think about the work you do, and use the table below to note whether an area is one that needs work, is serving you and your organization well enough, or is already a strength.

CAPACITIES	VERY POOR	POOR	AVERAGE	GOOD	EXCELLENT
CLEAR OBJECTIVES					
BRAND FOR THE PROJECT OR ORGANIZATION					
SOMEONE IS "ON POINT"					
COMMUNICATIONS IS "PART OF THE PLAN"					
IDENTIFYING TARGET AUDIENCES					
ELEVATOR SPEECHES					
USING STORIES					
SETTING GOALS AND METRICS					

**3 Words (Or Less)** Describe the work you do in three words.  
You may not use any words in your organization's name.

.....

.....

.....



# Strategy before tactics

**Primary Goal:** What will you achieve during the next six months?

**Objective:** What is a measurable step you need to accomplish within the next six months to move forward on your goal?

**Decision Makers:** Who makes your objective a reality?



# Narrative Campaigns

The Narrative Campaign framework begins with the Story of You, where you share your own story and link your story to the story of others in the community — the Story of We. Finally, using the Story of Now, launch your campaign and push for the change needed.

**STORY OF YOU:** How did you come to be here? What is your story?

**STORY OF WE:** How does your organization bring folks' stories together?

**STORY OF NOW:** What is your pressing need? What do you want to change?



# Tactics and Capacity

Making communications a part of planning also means understanding the resources you have to work with. Develop an approach that targets one audience within the resources (or “capacity”) that is already available to your organization.

TACTIC		
AUDIENCE	STORIES	COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS
Who do you need to reach?	What do they need to hear?	How will you reach them?
CAPACITY		
PEOPLE	COST	FACILITIES & EQUIPMENT
Is this a project you could take on yourself? Would you require any experts or volunteers?	What financial resources would be needed? What about in-kind resources?	Would you need access to particular spaces or facilities? What about equipment?
TIMELINE		
Can this be completed in three months? Six months? What are the key moments or milestones along the way?		



# Elevator Speech

**IDEA:**

Try starting from the bottom and working your way from Action to Opening.

**Opening:** Capture your listener's attention and interest.

**Challenge or Opportunity:** What is the specific issue?

**Solution:** How can our community respond to the issue?

**Action:** What can they do to get involved? What's the next step?



## WRITING FOR THE WEB AND SOCIAL MEDIA

### THREE KINDS OF STORIES

**New Story**  
(News, Happenings, Actions)

**Story Bank**  
(Member Stories, Archive)

**Aggregated Story**  
(Partners, Social Media, Local  
and National Media)

## WRITING FOR THE WEB AND SOCIAL MEDIA

<b>TITLE</b>	The more meaningful and descriptive the title, the more likely your article will be found and read.
<b>SUMMARY</b>	1-2 Sentence summaries will help reinforce why the reader should continue, so provide enough information to make it appealing. The summary is ready-made for Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.
<b>CALLS TO ACTION</b>	One or more 'action steps' the reader is invited to take.
<b>BODY</b>	400-800 words

## AUDIENCES

Don't forget community members whose friends, family, or coworkers are featured in the story. Are there other stakeholders?

<b>AUDIENCE #1</b>	
<b>AUDIENCE #2</b>	







The Kentucky Arts Council, the state arts agency, supports Appalshop with state tax dollars and federal funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.